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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to test the empirical merit of R. M. Chisholm's and T. D. Feehan's proposed typology of deception: (1) commission versus omission (lies of commission are those where the liar contributes causally to the receiver's believing the lie, perhaps by telling the falsehood; lies of omission would occur if the liar could have prevented the receiver from believing the falsity, but chose not to do so); (2) positive or negative (a positive lie occurs when the liar causes the receiver to add a false belief to his or her inventory; a negative lie results in the receiver losing a true belief); and (3) simpliciter versus secundum quid (deception simpliciter occurs when the liar converts the receiver from a state of not being deceived to the state of false belief; secundum quid takes place when the receiver already believes falsely and may spontaneously correct him or herself if left alone, but the liar acts to maintain the falsehood). Subjects included 202 undergraduate students who were told that the study concerned reactions to a written conversation--the topic of deception was never mentioned. Each student read one of nine possible conversations, each of which concerned the same situation. Afterwards, each student filled out a solidarity and trust scale. Results supported the existence of a positive (add a false belief) versus negative (take away a true belief) dimension, as well as a commission (tell a direct lie) versus omission (fail to correct a falsity) factor. Data did not support the simpliciter versus secundum quid as an important factor. (HOD)

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EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FOR A TYPOLOGY OF LIES

Dale Hample

Abstract

This study reports results of an investigation designed to test whether Chisholm and Feehan's (1977) proposed typology of deception has empirical merit. Dependent variables are trust and solidarity. Results support the existence of a positive (add a false belief) versus negative (take away a true belief) dimension, as well as a commission (tell a direct lie) versus omission (fail to correct a falsity) factor. Data do not support simpliciter (conversion from a state of true belief) versus secundum quid (support for an existing state of false belief) as an important factor. The study concludes that further research on lies should classify deceptive stimuli according to the supported 2 by 2 typology.

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EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FOR A TYPOLOGY OF LIES

Nearly all our messages are truthful, and one of the most basic assumptions of interpersonal communication is that all parties respect the injunctions to be relevant and accurate (Grice, 1975; Ehninger, 1977). But as with any social rule, deviations (which McHugh, 1970, insists involve a free and informed choice to perform violative behaviors) occur. Hample (1980a) has recently reported some survey data which suggest that people lie about twice a day. Shimanoff's (1980) rules theory specifies that an ordinary consequence of rule violation is some sort of social penalty, and research specific to lies has shown that, when detected, lies are punished (Hample, 1980a; 1980b).

Lies are therefore theoretically interesting for a number of reasons. They defy a social convention which grounds the very possibility of human communication. Deviance is itself an intriguing social event, and lying is a thoroughly communication-centered research target. Detected deception can be pivotal in other's perceptions of, and communicative relations with, a liar. Trust and solidarity are both affected by the awareness that someone has lied (Hample, 1980b), and these two variables are in turn associated with self-disclosure (Wheeless, 1976; 1978; Wheeless & Grotz, 1977), which has far-reaching implications for interpersonal relations (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). One would expect lying to depress credibility as well, and the importance of credibility to social influence hardly requires documentation (but see Andersen, 1978, chs. 11 & 12, anyway).

Perhaps for these reasons, lying has lately begun to attract the attention of communication scholars (see Knapp & Comadena, 1979, for a recent review of the literature). Nearly all of this work has apparently viewed lying

as a single kind of event. That is, one either lies or one doesn't; the empirical studies do not often display any awareness that there may be types of lies, or that different kinds of lies may have different causes, performances or effects.

Such an assumption is extremely problematic, as most of us (including these researchers) would immediately recognize. Goffman (1959, pp. 58-66), for instance, is careful to distinguish between "barefaced" and "white lies." Though we ordinarily think of lies as offensive, this is not always so. Johnson (1972) has written an interesting account of "gundecking," which illustrates this point. Gundecking is the faking of inspection reports in the Navy. It occurs when the reports are regarded as trivial, and when actually performing the inspection would be seriously inconvenient. Gundecking is usually covert to a great degree, but many people (including the report recipients) typically know about it unofficially. When done "properly," gundecking is not punished, and may well be appreciated. Even if gundecking is not typical of deception in general, it is surely a lie of some sort. In quite another context, Alexander Pope comments cynically on the usual social expectation that one refrain from lying:

> 'T is not enough, your counsel still be true;
> Blunt truths more mischief than nice falsehoods do;
> Men must be taught as if you taught them not,
> And things unknown propos'd as things forgot.
> (An Essay on Criticism, lines 572-575)

Nice falsehoods, gundecking, white lies--can we do realistic research on lying without being able to distinguish between these and, say, the Watergate lies?

We need a method of classifying lies. A typology has recently been proposed by two philosophers (Chisholm & Feehan, 1977), and the purpose of the present study is to test their system, which consists of three dichotomous dimensions.

The first of these is commission versus omission. Lies of commission are those where the liar contributes causally to the receiver's believing the lie, perhaps by telling the falsehood. In contrast, a lie by omission would occur if the liar could have prevented the receiver from believing the falsity, but chose not to do so. The recent important work by Bowers, Elliott and Desmond (1977) and Nofsinger (1976) seems to focus on lies of omission. I would be lying by commission if I told you a falsehood about myself; I would lie by omission if you stated something untrue about me and I did not correct you.

Secondly, lies may be positive or negative. This dimension refers to the receiver's stock of beliefs. A positive lie occurs when the liar causes the receiver to add a false belief to his/her inventory (or to retain such a belief). A negative lie results in the reciever losing a true belief. I would be lying positively if I told you I.C.A. is planning to publish a new journal, and negatively if I claimed that Human Communication Research has been eliminated (because you would lose your present belief that HCR will continue to appear).

The final dichotomy is simpliciter versus secundum quid. This factor takes account of whether the liar initiates the receiver's false belief or merely helps him/her continue in a false belief. Deception simpliciter occurs when the liar converts the receiver from a state of not being deceived to the state of false belief. Secundum quid takes place when the receiver already believes falsely and may spontaneously correct himself/herself if left alone, but the liar acts to maintain the falsehood. So it would be simpliciter for me to tell you that the Journal of Communication is not really published by I.C.A. Assuming that you already thought that I.C.A. members may not also belong to S.C.A., deception secundum quid might involve my giving you reassurance that you were correct.

Chisholm and Feehan (1977) hold that some kinds of lies are worse than

others: commission is worse than omission, positive worse than negative, and simpliciter worse than secundum quid. In the analyses of variance to follow, these will be the hypothesized main effects. Chisholm and Feehan do not make firm predictions about interactions (but see p. 145 n. 3), and so none are hypothesized here.

It only remains to explain how "worse" is to be operationalized. Though several measures might be chosen as dependent variables, trust (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977; see Pearce, 1974) and solidarity (Wheeless, 1978) are used here. Trust is an obvious choice, because loss of trust is nearly synonymous with detection of deception. Since the goal of this study is to validate Chisholm and Feehan's typology, it is essential that we be able to relate the types of lies to some fundamental consequences of lying. Loss of trust should be one. Solidarity, on the other hand, is elected because it is a general measure of interpersonal cohesion. It is part of a close-knit family of important interpersonal variables (Wheeless, 1976; 1978). Therefore, if some types of lies seriously affect solidarity, we will be encouraged to believe that such lies need to be allowed for in our interpersonal theories. So in general, our research strategy is this: the typology will be supported to the degree that its categories predict diffential effects on trust and solidarity. Classifications which make no difference on these dependent measures will be regarded as useless.

Method

Subjects were 202 undergraduates enrolled in a university-required public speaking course at the author's institution. Of these students, 55% were female and 45% male. Most were upperclassmen: 42% were seniors, 37% juniors, 17% sophomores, and 3% freshmen.

Students were told that the study concerned reactions to a written conversation; the topic of deception was never mentioned. Each student read

one of the nine possible conversations. Everyone filled out the same scales.

The conversations all concerned the same situation. Two white-collar workers, Jim and Tom, discuss a job which Tom wants badly. Jim is the chair of the selection committee, and has supported Tom's opponent. Jim knows, in fact, that the other candidate has already been selected, but this has not yet been announced. All this background is common to all nine groups, and is prior to the conversation. Here are the conditions:

1. Commission, positive, simpliciter. Jim says Tom's competitor has withdrawn his candidacy.
2. Commission, positive, secundum quid. In response to Tom's mention of a rumor that the competitor has withdrawn, Jim confirms it.
3. Omission, positive, simpliciter. In response to Tom's mention of the same rumor as in condition 2, Jim says "I could imagine it" and later "You didn't hear a thing from me," all giving a surprised Tom the impression that the rumor is accurate.
4. Omission, positive, secundum quid. Jim refuses to comment on the rumor, but Tom has already convinced himself that it is true.
5. Commission, negative, simpliciter. Jim says he knows nothing about the job decision, and that he has dropped off the committee.
6. Commission, negative, secundum quid. Jim confirms the rumor that he has quit the committee.
7. Omission, negative, simpliciter. Jim refuses to comment on the rumor that he has quit the committee, but Tom eventually interprets this to mean that it is true.
8. Omission, negative, secundum quid. Jim refuses to comment on the rumor that he has quit the committee, but Tom continues to believe that it is true.

9. Control (no lie). Jim corrects the rumors that he has quit the committee and that Tom's competitor has withdrawn.

After reading one of the nine conversations (which were distributed randomly), each student filled out Wheeless' (1978) twenty-item solidarity scale and the Wheeless and Grotz (1977) Individualized Trust Scales for Jim (the liar). The scales had five intervals each. Data were collected on computer-scorable sheets. After filling out these scales, students responded to several items designed to test the induction, notably "Jim lied to Tom."

These procedures required about half an hour. After handing in responses, students were debriefed.

Results and Interpretation

Scales

Both the solidarity and trust scales were factor analyzed in an effort to confirm their structures.

Wheeless (1978) reports that the solidarity scale is unidimensional, with the only factor accounting for 63% of the variance. In the present study, the first factor explains only 34% of the variance. However, a one factor solution is still appropriate, both because factors after the first are relatively small (the second factor accounts for only 8% of the variance), and because no item has either a large or primary loading on factor II. Hample (1980b) reported that factor analysis of the same scale produced a one factor solution accounting for 30% of the total variance. Loadings in the present study also tend to be less extreme than those reported in Wheeless (1978). Reliability for the scale as used here is .89 (standardized item alpha).

Wheeless and Grotz (1977) report that the Individualized Trust Scales resolve into a one factor solution, which accounts for 59% of the variance. Here, factor I accounts for 47%. The figure in Hample (1980b) is about 46%.

Factors after the first in the present study explain relatively little variance (10% for factor II), and no scale has a higher loading on II than on I. Standardized item alpha is .92.

Wheeless (1978) reports that solidarity and individual trust correlate at .65; Hample (1980b) reports correlations of about .50. In the instant study, this correlation is .40 ($p < .001$).

In sum, the results of this and the previous lying study are not as clear-cut as in the original reports. Several explanations suggest themselves, but a likely one is that people make slightly different kinds of ratings of liars than of the more usual types of targets used in the Wheeless studies. It may well be worthwhile to investigate the rating behavior of people dealing with deviant as opposed to normal targets. If the deviant ratings are more variable, the differences between these and the Wheeless results would be explained. However, these differences should not obscure the findings that both scales are reliable and unidimensional.

Induction

Several items were included in the questionnaire in order to assess the induction's success. For the key item, "Jim lied to Tom," the experimental subjects agreed more readily than the control students ($t=1.96$, $p<.05$). Similar results obtained for "Jim created a new belief for Tom" ($t=2.00$, $p<.05$). Other, less directly worded items (e.g., "Jim helped Tom to drop an old belief") did not produce significant differences.

These items were also used as dependent measures in analyses of variance. "Jim lied to Tom" yielded significant main effects for positive v. negative ($F=5.75$, $p<.05$) and commission v. omission ($F=17.18$, $p<.001$), and for their interaction ($F=4.79$, $p<.05$), but not for simpliciter v. secundum quid ($F=.03$) or any other interactions. "Jim created a new belief for Tom" also resulted in significant main effects for positive v. negative ($F=4.53$, $p<.05$) and for

commission v. omission ($F=11.72$, $p<.001$), but not for simpliciter v. secundum quid ($F=.98$) or any interactions. Another item, "Jim helped Tom acquire a new belief," yielded the same two main effects ($F=9.83$, $p<.01$, and $F=6.44$, $p<.05$, respectively) but no other significant results. For all three items, the means are in the directions Chisholm and Feehan (1977) would predict: the lies are more obvious in the positive and commission conditions. The failure of simpliciter v. secundum quid to be significant (with a power of about .40 for $\alpha=.05$ and a small-to-medium effect size; Cohen, 1969), and the rarity of the positive by commission interaction, both prefigure the hypothesis results, to be discussed next. In general, though the induction was not dramatic, it seems to have worked; students reading what Chisholm and Feehan would call the worst lies were more likely to notice deception.

Hypotheses

For both dependent variables, trust and solidarity, main effects were hypothesized for positive v. negative, commission v. omision and simpliciter v. secundum quid, with the worse kind of lie listed first for each factor. No interactions were predicted, though data will nonetheless be examined for them.

The analysis of variance for trust showed significant effects for positive v. negative ($F=15.33$, $p<.001$) and commission v. omission ($F=14.25$, $p<.001$), but not for simpliciter ($F=.62$) or any two or three way interaction (although the positive by commission interaction is close: $F=2.92$, $p<.10$). Trust means are in the predicted directions for both significant factors: 33.4 for positive lies versus 42.82 for negative ones; 37.34 for lies of commission versus 43.54 for lies of omission (the theoretical neutral point is 45 on this fifteen item , five point scale). Power for the simpliciter test is about .40. Multiple R for the two effects, no interaction ANOVA is .37.

Solidarity results were similar, though weaker. Positive v. negative missed significance this time ($F=2.72$, $p=.10$) while commission v. omission acheived it ($F=3.91$, $p<.05$). Neither the simpliciter main effect ($F=2.24$, $p<.15$) nor any of the interactions (all $p>.50$) were significant. Means are in the predicted directions: 50.26 for positive lies and 53.07 for negative ones, and 50.36 for lies of commission versus 53.81 for lies of omission (the theoretical neutral point for this scale is 60). Multiple R for the two effect, no interaction ANOVA is .19.

Discussion

These results support the use of a 2 by 2 typology of lies. Lies may be positive (add a new, false belief) or negative (take away an old, true belief). They may be accomplished by commission (clearly stated lies) or by omission (failure to correct a misapprehension). The third hypothesized dimension, simpliciter v. secundum quid, is not supported here. Although the power of the tests for this variable was only about .40, the effect failed to emerge in three analyses: those for trust, solidarity and the induction items. This study's evidence for dropping the third dimension is therefore strong but (of course) not conclusive. More conclusive results would require both higher power and a sample of different lies. Both weaknesses appear in the present study because it was felt that any repeated measures designs would almost certainly sensitize subjects to the fact that the study dealt with deception; consequently, each of the 202 students read only one conversation. Clearer data bearing on the typology will require routine but large-scale research. Even so, support for the existence of the first two factors is encouraging.

Results generally indicate that we may expect people to react differently to the four kinds of lies. Trust and solidarity are especially

depressed by positive lies of commission, and are least affected by negative lies of omission. Use of the typology to classify lies should not prove to be difficult, and may well enhance the generalizability and interpretability of our growing body of reserach on deception.

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